

PROSPECT; or, *View of the Moral World.*

SATURDAY, November 2, 1804.

No. 48.

Comments upon the Sacred Writings of the Jews and Christians. Exodus Chapter 33.

MOSES and his god contradict themselves; for in verse 11 of this chapter it is thus written; "And the Lord spake unto Moses, face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend;" and in verse 20, thus, "And he said, thou canst not see my face; for there shall no man see me and live. And the Lord said, behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock; And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in the cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by; And I will take away my hand and thou shalt see my back parts; but my face shall not be seen." What a strange contradiction is here? according to the 11th verse, Moses is talking with God, face to face; and according to the 20th verse, this was impossible without producing instant death. How are these inconsistencies to be reconciled? If God revealed this book he certainly could have made it free from such gross and palpable errors; and if Moses or any other man wrote it he ought to have been ashamed of committing such egregious blunders. To call such a chapter as this divine revelation, is a departure from every thing which common sense and the reason of man consider correct. This chapter closes with a childish, curious, kind of hide and seek account of God and Moses among the rocks. Formerly Moses had the honour of looking God full in the face; but now it seems he is reduced to the degraded condition of being permitted to view only the posterior parts of the Jewish divinity! What stuff and nonsense is all this! Have Christian believers no better idea of the Supreme Being than to suppose he is creeping about among the rocks and mountains with Moses, and that he exhibits all the parts, form and appearance of a man?—Absurd as this is, yet such is the fact, and therefore their

book and their opinions predicated upon such a miserable relinquishment of genuine Theism are false and merit not the attention of a reasonable being. The only attention which ought to be paid to the book is, an exposition of its fallacies, and a refutation of its destructive errors.

Theological Enquiries concluded.

When a man sees his wife worship (to use the language of the church of England) another man with as much devotion as himself he has reason to be jealous ; but if she were only addicted to fondling a favourite parrot or lap-dog how silly and ridiculous he would make himself were he to be jealous of the animal, and in his wrath dash out the poor creature's brains ; yet such is the conduct of the god of Moses, who delights in distinguishing himself by the title of jealous god, and under these circumstances it is peculiarly unfortunate for him that he is wedded to a people who are constantly going a-whoring after other gods. Indeed if I must take the liberty of deciding betwixt the Hebrews and their god, I should say that if he desired they should cleave to him, and him only, he should have used them better and been more indulgent ; and above all not to have led them so often into temptation.

Quitting for a moment the character of the god, and considering the subject as purely political, we shall then see it in its true light. It was Moses that was jealous. If he had suffered the people of Israel to intermarry with the Midianites, they would insensibly have melted into the mass of that nation, and his power been reduced to a shadow—and more especially if he had suffered a prince of Israel and a princess of Midian to form an alliance. Therefore it was the political craft of Moses to ascribe anger and jealousy, passions with which his own bosom burned, to this imaginary god. This explanation is further elucidated by the subsequent conduct of Moses with regard to the Midianites, for we read in Numb chap. 31

that he armed a 1000 of every tribe and sent to war against the Midianites, under the conduct of this same Phinehas, the son of Eleazar the priest.

When we look upon these actions as the work of Moses we cannot help considering him as a profound politician, equal even to Pitt himself; but if they are to be ascribed to the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, it is evident, that he was not the true God, for he tells Moses to avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites. Now the children of Israel had no cause to seek revenge of the Midianites, who had done them no injury, but on the contrary had treated them with hospitality, and it is probable that a majority of the Hebrews bore no animosity, or cherished a spirit of revenge against the Midianites any more than the people of the United States do at this moment against the French. But Moses as a political general has cause of revenge; for that reason, and for no other, were the ignorant and egregiously duped Israelites led into a war against their best friends, a war that is marked with every atrocity that can possibly be conceived by the most diabolical mind, and all under the direction of the Lord, the wonder-working god of the Hebrews; for it is expressly said that they warred against the Midianites as the Lord commanded Moses, and slew all the males! gave no quarter! what barbarians! Even Eri, Rekem, Zur, Hur and Reba, five Kings of Midian, Balaam also the son of Beor they slew with the sword. Balaam, their good friend, the incorruptible Balaam, who could not even be bribed to do them the smallest injury, they slew with the sword! He who said blessed is he who blest thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee, they slew with the sword. What foul ingratitude! Balaam falls by the sword of the Hebrews for blessing them and obeying their god, contrary to his own interest.

But what follows has no parallel in the history of any nation, nor has its cruelty been equalled by the most sanguinary tyrant. After the battle—in cool blood—every male among the little ones, and every woman that had known man, were ordered to be slain, and what rea-

son is assigned?—Some woman had caused the children of Israel to commit trespass against the Lord, and therefore all this wanton cruelty is to be exercised, and the innocent and guilty made to fall indiscriminately together.

Profession of Faith from Rousseau, continued.

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“Because, to give them such weight, requires three things; the concurrence of which is impossible. These are, that I should, in the first place, be a witness to the delivery of the prophecy; next, that I should be witness also to the event; lastly, that it should be clearly demonstrated to me that such event could not have followed by accident: For though a prophecy were as precise, clear, and determinate as an axiom of geometry; yet as the perspicuity of a prediction, made at random, does not render the accomplishment of it impossible, that accomplishment, when it happens, proves nothing in fact concerning the fore-knowledge of him who predicted it.”

“You see, therefore, to what your pretended supernatural proofs, your miracles and your prophecies reduce us:—to the folly of believing them all on the credit of others, and of submitting the authority of God, speaking to our reason, as to that of man. If those eternal truths of which my understanding forms the strongest conceptions, can possibly be false, I can have no hope of ever arriving at certitude, and so far from being capable of being assured that you speak to me from God, I cannot even be assured of his existence.”

You see, my child, how many difficulties must be removed before our disputants can agree; nor are these all. Among so many different religions, each of which proscribes and excludes the other, one only must be true, if indeed there be such a one among them all. Now to discover which this is, it is not enough to examine that

one ; it is necessary to examine them all, as we should not, on any occasion whatever, condemn without a hearing. It is necessary to compare objections with proofs, and to know what each object to in the rest, as well as what the others have to offer in their defence. The more clearly any sentiment or opinion appears demonstrated, the more narrowly it behoves us to enquire, what are the reasons which prevent its opponents from subscribing to it. We must be very simple, indeed, to think an attention to the theologists of our own party sufficient to instruct us in what our adversaries have to offer. Where shall we find divines, of any persuasion, perfectly candid and honest ? Do they not all begin to weaken the arguments of their opponents, before they proceed to refute them ? Each is the oracle of his party, and makes a great figure among his partizans, with such proofs as would expose him to ridicule among those of a different persuasion. Are you desirous of gaining information from books ? What a fund of erudition will not this require ! How many languages must you learn ! How many libraries must you turn over ! And who is to direct you in the choice of the books ? There are hardly to be found in any one country the best books on the contrary side of the question, and still less is it to be expected we should find books on all sides. The writings of the adverse and absent party, were they found, would be very easily refuted. The absent are always in the wrong ; and the most weak and insufficient arguments, laid down with a confident assurance, easily efface the most sensible and valid, when exposed with contempt. Add to all this, that nothing is more fallacious than books, nor exhibit less faithfully the sentiments of their writers. The judgment which you formed, for instance, of the Roman Catholic religion, from the the treatise of Rosset, was very different from that which you acquired by residing among us. You have seen that the doctrines we maintain in our controversies with the protestants, are not those which are taught the common people, and that Rosset's book by no means resembles the instructions delivered

from the pulpit. To form a proper judgment of any religion, we are not to deduce its tenets from the books of its professors; we must go and learn it among the people. Each sect have their peculiar traditions, their customs, and modes of acceptance, which constitute the peculiar mode of their faith; all which should be taken into consideration when we form a judgment of their religion.

How many considerable nations are there, who print no books of their own, and read none of ours! How are they to judge of our opinions, or we of theirs? We laugh at them, they despise us; and though our travellers have turned them into ridicule, they need only to travel among us, to ridicule us in their turn. In what country are there not to be found men of sense and sincerity, friends of truth, who require only to know, in order to embrace it? And yet every one imagines truth confined to his own particular system, and thinks the religion of all other nations in the world absurd; these foreign modes, therefore, cannot be in reality so very absurd as they appear, or the apparent reasonableness of ours is less real.

We have three principal religions in Europe. One admits only of one revelation, another of two, and the third of three. Each holds the other in detestation, anathematizes its professors, accuses them of ignorance, obstinacy and falsehood. What impartial person will presume to decide between them, without having first examined their proofs, and heard their reasons? That which admits only of one revelation is the most ancient, and seems the least disputable; that which admits of three is the most modern, and seems to be the most consistent; that which admits of two, and rejects the third, may possibly be the best; but it hath certainly every prepossession against it: its inconsistency stares one full in the face.

In all these three revelations, the sacred books are written in languages unknown to the people who believe in them. The Jews no longer understand Hebrew; the christians neither Greek nor Hebrew; the Turks and Persians understand no Arabick; and even the modern Arabs themselves speak not the language of

Mahomet. Is not this a very simple manner of instructing mankind, by talking to them always in a language which they do not comprehend? But these books, it will be said, are translated; a mighty pretty answer! Who can assure me they are translated faithfully, or that it is even possible they should be so? Who can give me a sufficient reason why God, when he hath a mind to speak to mankind, should stand in need of an interpreter?

I can never conceive, that what every man is indispensably obliged to know, can be shut up in these books; or that he who is incapacitated to understand them, or the persons who explain them, will be punished for involuntary ignorance. But we are always plaguing ourselves with books. What a frenzy! Because Europe is full of books, the Europeans conceive them to be indispensable, without reflecting that three fourths of the world know nothing at all about them. Are not all books written by men? How greatly, therefore, must man have stood in need of them, to instruct him in his duty; and by what means did he come to the knowledge of such duties, before books were written? Either he must have acquired such knowledge himself, or it must have been totally dispensed with.

We, Roman Catholics, make a great noise about the authority of the church: but what do we gain by it, if it requires as many proofs to establish this authority as other sects require immediately to establish their doctrines? The church determines that the church hath a right to determine. Is not this a special proof of its authority? And yet depart from this, and we enter into endless discussions.

Do you know many Christians, who have taken the pains to examine carefully into what the Jews have alleged against us? If there are a few who know something of them, it is from what they have met with in the writings of Christians: a very pretty manner truly of instructing themselves in the arguments of their opponents! But, what can be done? If any one should dare to publish among us such books as openly espouse

the cause of judaism, we should punish the author, the editor, and the bookseller*. This policy is very convenient, and very sure to make us always in the right. We can refute at pleasure those who are afraid to speak.

Those among us, also, who have an opportunity to converse with the Jews, have but little advantage. These unhappy people know they lie at our mercy; the tyranny we exercise over them, renders them justly timid and reserved; they know how far cruelty and injustice are compatible with Christian charity: What, therefore, can they venture to say to us, without running the risk of incurring the charge of blasphemy? Avarice inspires us with zeal, and they are too rich not to be ever in the wrong.

The most sensible and learned among them are the most circumspect and reserved. We make a convert, perhaps, of some wretched hireling, to calumniate his sect; set a parcel of pitiful brokers disputing, who give up the point merely to gratify us; but while we triumph over the ignorance or meanness of such wretched opponents, the learned among them smile in contemptuous silence at our folly.

* Among a thousand known instances, the following stands in no need of comment. The Catholic divines of the sixteenth century having condemned all the Jewish books, without exception, to be burned, a learned and illustrious theologian, who was consulted on that occasion, had very nigh involved himself in ruin, by being simply of opinion that such of them might be preserved as did not relate to Christianity, or treated of matters foreign to religion.

To be continued.

New-York: Published every Saturday, by ELIHU PALMER, No. 26, Chatham-street. Price Two Dollars per ann. paid in advance.